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Occupational Potential and Possible Selves of Healthcare Students with Dyslexia: A Narrative Inquiry



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Learning Outcomes:

To understand:

- Occupational potential and possible selves.
- How they can be applied in research within a narrative inquiry framework.
- Some of the implications of growing up with dyslexia (including inhibiting and facilitating factors).
- Some implications of the research findings to education and practice.



Professional Doctorate in Education (Ed D)

The research journey. A personal and professional venture.



Research Aim, Questions and Method

Aim

- Explore the occupational potential (Wicks, 2005) and possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) of healthcare students with dyslexia and consider the strategies put in place in relation to possible selves of the past, present and future.

Research Questions

- How are the possible selves of healthcare students with dyslexia shaped?
- What strategies (if any) are employed to reach possible selves?
- What role (if any) does occupational potential play in reaching desired possible selves and avoiding feared or undesired possible selves?

Method

Up to 3 semi structured interviews with 9 healthcare students with dyslexia studying on level seven/ M level courses.

Methodology



Narrative Inquiry

Temporal
Personal Social
Spatial (Clandinin
and Connolly, 2000)

Possible Selves

“What they might become,
what they would like to
become and what they are
afraid of becoming”
(Markus and Nurius, 1986, p.
954).

**Occupational
Potential**

“What can be brought into actuality
through engagement in
occupation”
(Asaba and Wicks, 2010 p. 122).

Ethics



Research ethics granted by university Local Research Ethics Coordinator, 13 November 2014

Considerations:

- Recruitment of level 7 full time healthcare students with dyslexia via course leaders. Anonymity retained. Pseudonyms used. Confidentiality.
- Tutor and student relationship – No benefits and carefully managed interviews whereby the students were in control of disclosure.
- Informed consent (verbal and signed).
- Reflexivity – journals and letter writing (Finlay and Ballinger, 2006; Clandinin and Connolly, 2000).
- Hearability (Gilligan et al., 2003).

Dyslexia

- A neurodiversity, “a normal human difference that should be tolerated and respected in the same way as other human differences” (Griffin and Pollak, 2009, p. 25).
- The word 'dyslexia' comes from Greek and means 'difficulty with words'. It is a lifelong, usually genetic, inherited condition and affects around 10% of the population (BDA, ND).
- Characteristics include difficulties with processing, working and short term memory and can affect spelling, reading, maths ...each person is unique!

Dyslexia – Reality v' Myth



- Many parents struggle to gain support for children in school (Rose, 2009; Lamb, 2009; Gove, 2011). Perverse Incentives (Gray et al., 2013).
- Labelling/ diagnosis is often avoided and is problematic (Riddick, 2011), expensive and advised against (Gove, 2011). Term: Specific Learning Disability tends to be used.
- A Socially Constructed Myth - Learned helplessness (Elliot, 2005; Elliot & Gregerinko, 2014).
- Social Reality of Dyslexia - between 20-51% of offenders have dyslexia (MacDonald, 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2012).



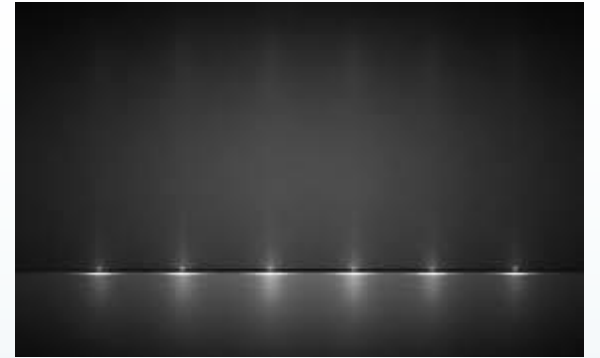
Dyslexia – Reality v' Myth



- Biological explanation for Dyslexia - Brocas and Wernickers areas (Frontal and Temporal lobes - language) (Christodoulou et al., 2014).
- Strategies can help – neuroplasticity (Heim, 2015).
- Disclosure can be a complex issue, particularly in healthcare (Dearnley, 2010; Nalavany, Carawan & Sauber, 2013). Seen by some as a fixed phenomenon (Evans, 2014).



Acts and Scenes



- Hearability (Gilligan et al., 2003)
- Spirit and Audibility (Douglas and Carless, 2013)
- Narrative inquiry should articulate new knowledge in a way that engages new audiences and **shines a light on the valuable experiences of the people whose voices the research represents** (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000).
- Acts and scenes.
- **The audience is asked to picture a stage with students sitting in a line and a light shining down on them as they speak.** I am positioned next to them.



Abigail

When I was in reception the teachers pulled my Mum and said, "She's really intelligent, she can read. The others can't read".

My Mum was like, "Are you sure?"

And what I was doing was, I was pretending I could read. I was picking up books we'd read in class and was pretending to read them to the other kids. Using the pictures or how I remembered the stories.

My mum knew I couldn't read. I would just pretend to be reading when actually I wasn't and it took me a long time to (learn to) read because I was convinced I was really clever but I was pretending to read. The teachers would have to sit me down and go over the words. I'd go off the pictures or off what I knew of the story. They would have to keep telling me to read the words. I was just telling a story with a book in my hand. (Laughs) On the first day of reception I sat down with this girl and was like, "I'll read you a story" (laughs).



Abigail



So .. I went through primary school and quite quickly the teachers realised I wasn't a genius. I couldn't read and my main struggle was spelling ...I struggled even at a young age.

I got more and more aware of it as I came up through primary school...I was always in ...mainly the middle or bottom table as I came up through primary school into years 5 and 6.

We had to do spelling tests where we had to stand up and say the word. It was awful! I just, I can write them better. ...

I always knew. I find that hard. I always knew I'd be really upset ... if a spelling test was coming along and then I can really remember in...year 5, a teacher stood me up and said "this is the worst speller in the world" and asked me to spell, ... a 3 letter word ... 'ton' and I put an 'e' on the end but I was panicking as soon as I stood up. I was really panicking. I was so upset (crying), I, (crying).

Mum was quite angry...

Abigail



Both my parents were teachers, they really wanted me to be a teacher. I don't know if it was because of my skill set or because I always played teachers, but they really wanted me to be a teacher. Me and my mum had a really deep chat and she told me she felt really guilty that my (older) sister Rachel was probably dyslexic but no one ever knew. She hated school and got in with the wrong crowd and had children very young.

She feels she failed a little bit with my sisters because she hasn't given them the confidence to go and do what they want. She says she's confident with me that what I want I'll just go and get it.

Abigail



Mum took me to the local sports centre and she said "there's this, I've signed you up. Would you like to go?" And I was like, "oh, I'd love to". So, I tried it and I used to train most days of the week and I remember I got injured when I was 16.

- Yeah, it gave me a lot of confidence in myself. So actually, I kind of took it because I did this and my mum loved supporting me and that was my thing that was different from my sisters so like I benefitted from gymnastics and sport. I spent so much time there when I was younger and I loved it. I loved the discipline, the organization; I loved that I was good at it. It gave me a lot.

Analysis and Findings

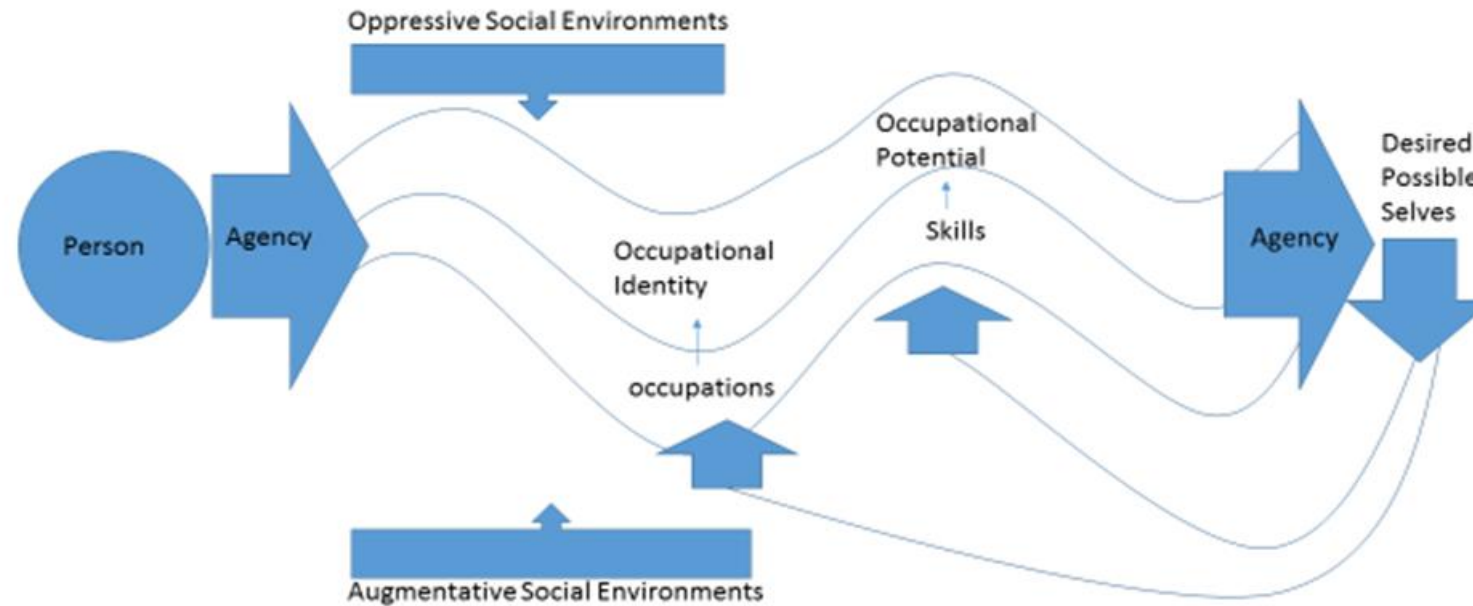


- Occupational Identity begins at an early age (Christiansen, 1999).
- Occupational Potential is fluid and dynamic (Asaba and Wicks, 2010).
- Childhood possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and identities are challenged.
- Social and occupational injustices are apparent and influence occupational potential.
- Families act to counteract this where possible: particularly with occupations and co occupations, helping the participants to reach occupational potential, develop occupational identities, desirable possible selves (PS) and avoid undesirable PS.
- Parental Possible Selves: The parent of a teacher, member of NASA, an Occupational Therapist!
- Occupation is used to develop capacities and possible selves but also possible selves infuse the meaning and purpose of occupations as environments are cued and agency is instrumentalised.

Abigail, "I loved that. I was good at it. It gave me a lot".

Implications to occupational therapy practice

Occupational Identity, Potential and Possible Selves



Implications to Occupational Therapy

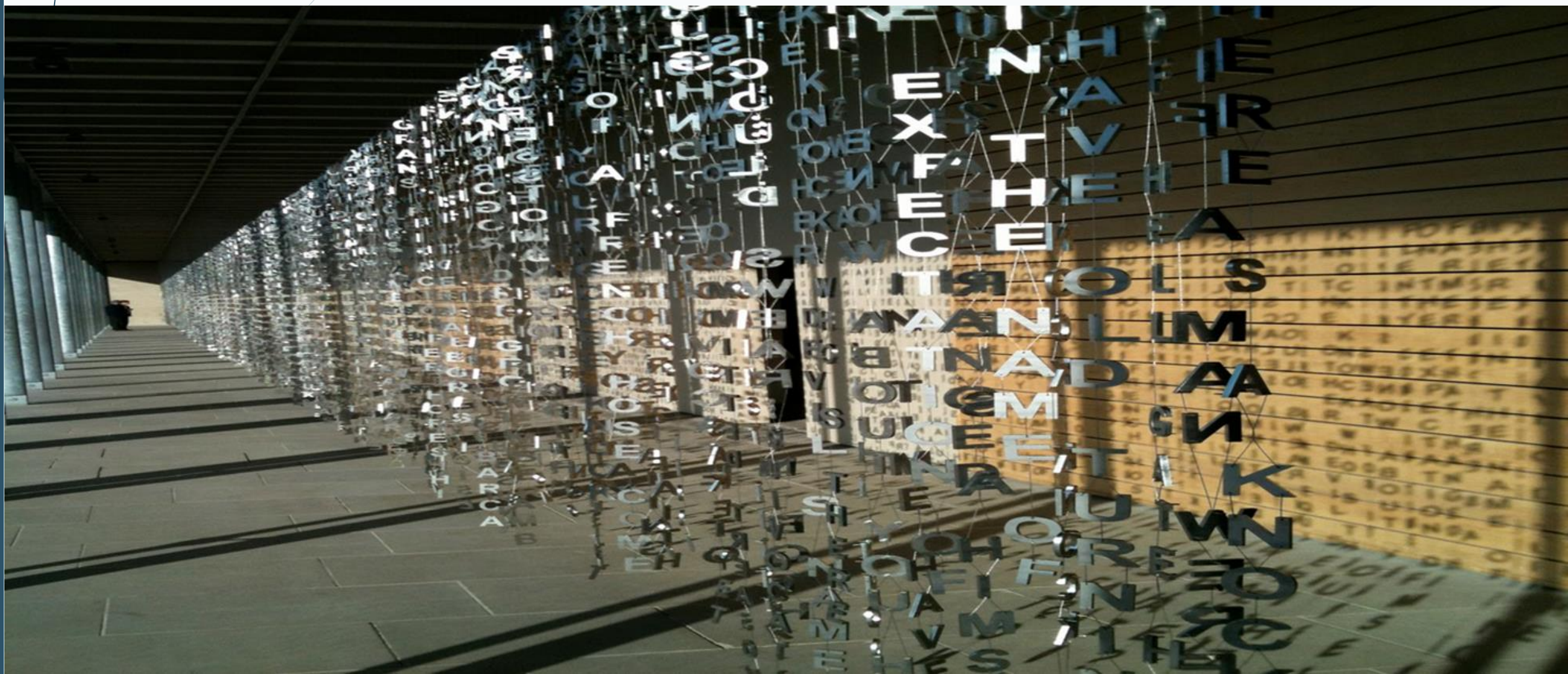


- Include occupational potential in occupational therapy programmes (Wicks, 2005).

Consider Occupational Therapists positioning in relation to dyslexia:

- Diagnostic process?
- Interventions to promote reaching occupational potential in study skills, learning/ engagement in education
- Reduction of school disengagement/ criminal justice system.
- Desirable possible selves – Occupational Therapy role.
- Occupational Possible Selves Model...post doctoral work.

Questions and Thank you



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